

Child of the Moon

by The Element of Air

Category: Avatar: Last Airbender
Genre: Family, Friendship
Language: English
Characters: Yue
Status: Completed
Published: 2016-04-07 22:35:06
Updated: 2016-04-07 22:35:06
Packaged: 2016-04-27 22:13:47
Rating: K
Chapters: 1
Words: 1,867
Publisher: www.fanfiction.net
Summary: This is her story.

Child of the Moon

****A/N: Submitting this for round three of the ProBending Circuit****

****Prompts:****

****Laughing (easy)**
>"**Life" (easy)
>"**Family" (hard)**

****Ba Sing Se Badgermoles/Earthbender****

****Word count: 1716****

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><p>The Night of the Full Snow Moon, the Year of the Horse

The night was silent. Inside the closed healer's igloo, the man could just make out faint lapping of water against the icy pathway. The salty waters swirled and ebbedâ€"a deep abyss that usually comforted the waterbender but now seemed completely out of place. In this night of grief, how dare the moon continue to push and pull the gentle tides. How dare she.

In this cool igloo, a woman knelt by a pool of liquid water. She was bendingâ€"pushing and pulling the water over some bundle of towels resting in the shallow waves. She immediately dropped her water, and closed her eyes in defeat.

"Yugoda, please," Chief Arnook said from behind her. "There must be

something else."

The middle-aged woman rose to her feet, now cradling a small swaddle of blankets, and turned around.

"I'm sorry. I have tried everything," Yugoda looked away from her chief. She couldn't bring herself to look in his eyes when she said, "Your daughter isn't going to make it."

"NO!" A deep bellow tore through the silence. His grief—his pain—his sadness—his guilt—all collided together in the shout. He felt hot tears sting his tired eyes, but above all his anger kept him going.

Yugoda walked over to her chief. "Go," she instructed, her eyes brimming with sympathy and compassion, her expression gentle. "Be with your wife. The only thing left is to pray. Ask the moon for her compassion and the ocean for his peace. I can offer you nothing more."

She placed the still infant in his arms and bowed for respect. Arnook looked down at the little child. Her breathing was shallow and her eyes refused to open. But gentle, she was. Tranquil, even. She was steady and small and—perfect. Even if his daughter didn't live, he would forever remember this moment, cradling his little babe in his arms, holding her close and refusing to let go.

He decided it was perhaps best to listen to the healer. He bowed his respect and appreciation for her efforts, then spun on his heel to leave the healer's cave.

The moment he was out in the open air—the pure moonlight flooding upon him—he felt—content. He gazed up at the moon: the sole light in the black sky offered just an inkling of light onto the deserted street. The hood of his heavy parka fell off his head as he craned his neck upwards. The freezing night air attacked his ears and burned his head with its icy madness.

Except he didn't feel it. He could feel nothing—not the child in his arms nor the ice beneath his feet. So entranced was he by the moon's thick gaze. He was not cold or hot; nor was he comfortable. There was nothing but—

Warmth.

He heard it, nothing more than a whisper. A small voice that echoed inside his head. Warmth, warmth, warmth. He looked down.

The lips of his daughter were turning blue. She was freezing in the night's chill, but the child was too ill to cry. He clutched her small frame to his chest, but he knew the outside of his parka was nearly as cold as the night air. His daughter needed warmth, and he was unable to give it to her. What was he to do?

Spirits.

Again, it was lower than a whisper. It felt as though the wind had just brushed past his ears and yet somehow that made him know: he needed to get them to the spirit oasis. It was the only place warm enough for his daughter. The only place that could keep her lips

olive and pink and healthy.

He took off at a fast pace to the small door at the end of the block. Clutching his barely-alive daughter to his cold chest.

He threw open the door, and the warm air cloaked them both. He shut out the icy wind and looked into the oasis. He'd only been in here once before, the night before his coronation.

He knewâ€”he wasn't sure how but he just knewâ€”that he needed to be under the spiritual arch. He walked as quickly as he could across the wooden bridges and looked up into the arch, suddenly feeling how powerful this place was.

"Please, Tui and La, pleaseâ€”it's my daughter. Sheâ€”she is ill. The healers do not know what to do. We are at a loss. Weâ€”I am afraid she will not survive the night. Tui- I put my daughter's life into your hands. La- I put her soul. Do what you must or do what you will, but please, I pray, please save my daughter."

He held his daughter up to the arch. Silence was its only response. He was at a loss and he lowered his infant daughter and brought her back to his chest.

"I'm sorry, daughter. I'm sorry."

It was in that vacant silence that Arnook heard a faint splashingâ€”rhythmic and smooth. A constant beat of lapping water. He turned to see the direction it came from. A crescent-shaped pool with two entwined koi fish.

He walked over to the pond (it seemed as if his feet moved of their own accord). He raised his daughter (again, he had no control over his actions) and lowered her swaddled-body into the black pool, inside the circling fish. His feet moved two paces back and he watched his daughter sink below the surface.

Oh spirits! What had he done? Hisâ€”his daughter! His baby girl, too weak to move a single muscle in her body, was sinking, sinking down below the surface of the water and drowningâ€”drowning! He moved closer to the pool, knowing his daughter was already far below the surface. But instead she lay, tummy up, on the surface of the black water. Her hair, a once deep shade of cool black, was now a magnificent _white!_ He had never seen such purity in one human being!

And then the baby infant did something she had never done before: she twitched her nose. Her eyes following the movement as they fluttered openâ€”huge crystal-blue orbs looking up at him. He was silent for a long timeâ€”too mesmerized by this sudden transformation to say anythingâ€”when suddenly a cry broke through the night. The baby! She had started to cry and scream and by Jove, that was the most beautiful sound he had heard in his entire life.

One Moon Cycle after the Winter Solstice, the Year of the Dog

It was her duty. It was her responsibility to give her people an heir, a security that the kingdom would prosper for generations. If only that idea didn't leave her feeling so emptyâ€”

Was there nothing else to life than being betrothed? Was there nothing left for her but marriage, babies, and death? Was that how her life would end? That banal and _meaningless_?

But that was selfish. Huan was a good man. He had the military honors to prove it; he was just and kind and generous. He would treat her well, and she him. They could be happy. They _would_ be happy.

If only that happiness didn't seem soâ€¦ pointless? Or was that too harsh of a word? Maybe unfulfilling better suited the description.

Stop being selfish! she wanted to scream. It was not meaningless because even if she didn't enjoy her life with Huan, he himself was useful. He was the kingdom's guarantee that they would have an heir to the throne; an assurance that her tribe wouldn't end but would instead thrive and prosper. Her people need that of her.

And she was prepared to do anything for her people.

â€¦

She was laughing! Could you believe it! She was actually smiling for the first time in days. Or was it weeks? When was the last time she so much as smiled? How long had it beenâ€¦

Well it didn't matter because she was laughing now. And to think all it took was a goofy, sarcastic, guy with a boomerang. His skin was such a beautiful mocha, and his eyes were the brightest of blue. He was charming despite being completely ridiculous. He was different and interesting, and she _liked it_.

Where she had been told to sit and be silent, he was loud and moving around.

When she thought she needed to be strong, he showed her it was okay to be weak.

Where she was afraid to love, he had already taken a headlong leap.

And now, as the two Water Tribe persons (so alikeâ€¦ how could they so different?) stood close together on an icy bridge, was the moment she realizedâ€¦ perhaps she too had already fallen.

Night of the Full Wolf Moon, the Year of the Dog

"Maybe I can give it back."

Even before she spoke, she knew it was true. This was her duty. This was the reason Tui had chosen her 16 years ago. It was for this very moment. _Everything in her life had led up to this precise moment._

She had a dutyâ€”this time not only to her country and her people but to the world. The world could not survive without the moon; it would be tossed into an irreparable chaos of death and destruction and pain and misery. This was the only way. It had to be her.

Her feet moved forward. Her hands move atop the motionless black

fish. A distant argument was just audible, and she knew it was Sokka. Of course he wouldn't want her to do this. That was so sweet of him.

"I have to do this," she said definitively. And she knew he would listen to that. Because even if he didn't like it, he had to know there was no other way. There was nothing more to do than help bring balance back into the world.

I love you, Sokka. The words were trapped behind her teeth, not able to escape and be known to the only person she didn't want to leave behind.

The fish was oddly warm, despite having been swimming in a cool pool. But she rested her finger pads on its oily, scaly flesh and drew a long inhale. Thenâ€|

She released.

* * *

><p>AN: *just wanted to point out that the genre "family" is relative not only to the relationship Yue has with her father, but also with her tribe. She has a sense of responsibility because of how much she loves her country, and I wanted to play with that idea since she feels so conflicted about disliking her betrothed but loving her nation. After all, the people of the Water Tribe have a deep sense of community and believe in a commitment to the one's they love.
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End
file.